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THE HEREDITARY FRIENDSHIP OF THE CININNATI

Address delivered at the Banquet given by the North Carolina
Society of the Cincinnati to the General Society of the
Cincinnati at Asheville, North Carolina,
May 10, 1917

By

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This is not a thesis to be proved in this assemblage of brothers—such a procedure would be, indeed, a “useless and ridiculous excess;” for the spirit of our gathering exemplifies such a friendship. So my efforts must be devoted to a retrospective view of a traditional friendship, consecrated by the generous hearts of our founders, embodied in our Institution, and held indissolubly as a precious heritage in kindred hearts, which have branched in the mighty space of our great land, but whose fibres stretch back to the common root of our country. And what more auspicious occasion for such contemplation could be imagined than this gathering, assembled at the behest of the friendship and generous hospitality of our brothers of the “Old North State,” a state whose evidence of earliest devotion to the very cause of our being is so proudly emblazoned on the beautiful flag of the “Land of the Long Leaf Pine?” To them and to the delegates of the various State Societies, our delegation extends the greetings of the Pennsylvania State Society of the Cincinnati.

Your presence inevitably brings to mind the early association of the founders of the Society; for we recall that the strife of those years was shared by men of all sections of the country, in a spirit of friendship and co-operation. The partial and sporadic associations of earlier colonial wars gave place to a union of all Americans; and the Continental Congress which assembled in

Philadelphia in the autumn of 1774 was the beginning of a great nation. The spirit of the country was united. Patrick Henry of Virginia proposed to the Continental Congress that all state lines should be obliterated for the fusion of a nation; committees of correspondence sprang into being to foster a homogeneous policy. We recall that Edenton, the old capital of North Carolina, vied with Boston in treating the British to a "tea party"—not so extensive an entertainment as that of her sister of far Massachusetts, but a very successful party.

And the greatest factor in our nationality—the very means of its being, when war came—was our army. I refer especially to the troops of the Continental Line, who were the vigorous embodiment of our ideals. Years of discipline, hardship and battle made this army the peer of any in the world. One recalls the enthusiastic words of Lafayette, the gallant Black Musketeer of King Louis, as he led south a force of these Continentals for the Virginia campaign of 1781: "They are the best troops that ever took the field; my confidence in them is unbounded; they are far superior to any British troops, and none will ever venture to meet them in equal numbers." In this army, there met and associated and loved, with a friendship that privation and danger rendered indissoluble, men of all the thirteen states. It was General Washington of Virginia who hurried from the Congress at Philadelphia to take command of the American army before Boston; it was General Nathanael Greene of Rhode Island who, after the failure of General Gates, was sent south to save that section, and whose skill and moderation so endeared him to the people that he fell captive to

their affection and lived and died in Georgia. It was at Camden, South Carolina, where, by the way, my own *propositus* served, Major Willian Ferguson of Pennsylvania, after the untrained and misled militia had fled the field, that the Delaware regiment stood firm and fought until almost annihilated; and the Maryland regulars broke through the British left in a desperate bayonet charge, wheeled upon its center and fought alone until enveloped by the whole British army. Officers of North Carolina, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Virginia, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and New York, froze and starved, with a patriotism which demanded mute suffering with nothing of the glory of battle, in the cantonments at Valley Forge during those dark days of the winter of 1777 and 1778. General "Mad Anthony" Wayne of Pennsylvania, whose descendant and heir is one of our Pennsylvania delegation, and his fighting Continentals aided Lafayette in pressing back Cornwallis to his last stand in Virginia; and Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Hamilton of New York led the American force, charging with unloaded rifles, over the redoubts at Yorktown. Turning, at random, the pages of Heitman's Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army, one finds such records as these: Brigadier-General Francis Nash of North Carolina, died October 7, 1777, of wounds received at Germantown; Captain John Rhodes of Delaware, taken prisoner at Camden; Captain Ignatius Few of Georgia, taken prisoner at Amelia Island; Lieutenant John Mansfield of Connecticut, wounded at Yorktown. "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of" Lieuten-

ant-Colonel John Laurens of South Carolina, wounded at Germantown, and at Monmouth; Lieutenant Lawrence Manning of Pennsylvania, wounded at Eutaw Springs; Lieutenant Benajah Osmon of New Jersey, taken prisoner at Charleston; Lieutenant-Colonel John Eager Howard of Maryland, received a medal for conduct at the battle of Cowpens, wounded at Eutaw Springs; Captain David Kirkpatrick of New York, wounded at Yorktown; Captain Edmund Munro of Massachusetts, killed at Monmouth; Colonel Alexander Scammell of New Hampshire, mortally wounded at Yorktown; Captain Richard Clough Anderson of Virginia, wounded at Trenton, wounded at Savannah, taken prisoner at Charleston; Captain Stephen Olney of Rhode Island, wounded at Yorktown. "Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness. * * * Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, * * * waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

Thus the records show us that men of one section of the country were continually serving in other sections, and indicate how great was the opportunity for the comingling and association of men of all the thirteen original states.

The surrender of Cornwallis and the cessation of formal hostilities ushered in what John Fiske has so aptly termed "the critical period of American history." The removal of the unifying policies of a common war resolved the American states, untried in peaceful concert, into a group of local units exultant in a new-found freedom, and unmindful of the strength that comes only from union. The Congress was a nerveless government

whose power was that of recommendation, practically without authority, money or credit.

At Newburgh, on the Hudson, was encamped the American army. Eight long years had elapsed since Lexington, and now, with the uniting stress of conflict removed, the officers and men faced disbandment and dispersal to distant homes and the uncertain prospects of the unfamiliar tasks of peace. The officers, to whom had been entrusted the prosecution of war and the achievement of Liberty, viewed with dismay the gloomy prospects which confronted them. With peace, their occupation and prestige and value were diminished. Many of them faced impoverishment and actual want.

Among the soldiers there was widespread dissatisfaction and turbulence, caused by the apparent ingratitude of the republic and the seeming niggardness of the government.

Washington, by his tact and firmness, calmed the agitation; and the officers supported his policy, resolved to show their disapproval of doctrines of military supremacy and their determination to support their country's government, first and last, and to do and to bear, in war and in peace.

They might expect time to remedy personal want; but how would time and separation affect the friendship which was so dear to their hearts? Comrades, united by long-shared dangers and suffering and hardship, were about to part, and they shrank from the prospect before them and longed for "some link which would still unite them together at periodical intervals, when they could revive

around the social board the scenes of their past privations and * * * triumphs." To General Knox, ever famed for generous impulses, is given the credit for devising a plan "by which a hope was entertained that their long-cherished friendship and social intercourse might be perpetuated, and that at future periods they might annually communicate, and revive a recollection of the bond by which they were connected."

These foregoing circumstances were considered: the possible material needs of brother officers and their families; the wish to give their best support to the government of the nation they had created; and the desire to perpetuate the friendship which had so long existed between them. So it was upon the three main pillars of Charity, and Patriotism, and Friendship that was rested the Society of the Cincinnati, which came into being at the cantonment on the Hudson, on May 13, 1783. The name suggested their patriotism, in happily connoting the rugged virtues of the old Roman who was above all a citizen, but also the most thorough-going soldier at the call of his country; and the tenets of their patriotic faith were expressed in the Institution. For charitable purposes, an inalienable fund was created. As for the all-pervading motive of friendship, we have the text of the Institution; and we will recall also the words of the greatest of the founders. Washington wrote in that same year, to the Count De Rochambeau: "The officers of the American army, in order to perpetuate that mutual friendship which they contracted in the hour of common danger and distress * * * have united together in a society of friends under the name of Cincinnati * * *." And Major-

General Baron von Steuben, that doughty staff officer of Frederick the Great, president of the convention which established the Society, stated, in July 1783, "the chief motive * * * is to perpetuate that virtuous affection which in so exemplary a manner existed among them while in arms for the defence of their country."

And because they wished for their friendship—as indeed we all wish for everything that we love—a continuous and perpetual existence, they made the order hereditary, "to endure as long as they shall endure, or any of their eldest male posterity; and, in failure thereof, the collateral branches who may be judged worthy of becoming its supporters and members." Thus was insured the motto, "Esto perpetua."

An admirable plan for continued intercourse, in those days of infrequent communication and difficult travel, was devised. Since a large part of the army had disbanded before the Institution was formed, active steps were taken for the organization of State Societies. These efforts met with universal approval and before the end of 1783 Societies had been organized in all the thirteen states. We all know the provision which fittingly set aside the anniversary of American independence as the day for the assembling of the local Societies; the provision for intercommunication among the states; and that for the Triennial Meeting of the General Society.

Almost immediately the Society was assailed with a force and a bitterness, which seem to us, secure in the established principles of our government, quite astounding. But democracy was then an experiment, fear gave substance to apprehensions, and it was many years be-

fore the bugbear of monarchical and aristocratic rule was laid away. Legislatures, members of Congress, orators and a host of writers, valiantly shedding ink in a mythical defence of their country, flew to arms. The hereditary principle was the chief objection. The idea of perpetuating the memory of an epoch, of "raising the glow of generous emulation in the breast of posterity, to supply the broken links in an endless chain of good fellowship," to pass the eagle "from father to son, according to the law of primogeniture", created a great furor of opposition among those who feared that the Society would undermine the republic, usurp the supreme power of the state and establish a powerful nobility.

This opposition to the Society was the engrossing question of the first General Meeting, at Philadelphia, in May 1784. Delegates were present from all the thirteen states. Washington, President-General of the Society, lending his efforts and his influence to the establishing of a nation, felt grievously the responsibility for the decision of the Society. Harmony throughout the country was imperative and patriotism seemed to dictate the sacrifice of personal sentiments. Owing largely to his influence, an amended Institution was formed, which provided for the abolition of the hereditary feature and an alteration of other provisions which had met with opposition. A circular letter, announcing these changes and requesting their adoption, was sent to the various State Societies. In regard to hereditary succession, this circular letter recited:—"Having lived in the strictest habits of amity through the various stages of a war unparalleled in many of its

circumstances; having seen the objects for which we contended happily attained; in the moment of triumph and separation, when we were about to act the last pleasing, melancholy scene in our military drama—pleasing, because we were to leave our country possessed of independence and peace; melancholy, because we were to part, perhaps never to meet again;—while every breast was penetrated with feelings which can be more easily conceived than described; while every little act of tenderness recurred fresh to the recollection, it was impossible not to wish our friendships should be continued; it was extremely natural to desire that they might be perpetuated by our posterity to the remotest ages. With these impressions and with such sentiments, we candidly confess we signed the Institution.” But, at the apprehensions of many of their countrymen, they would not, they declared, “hesitate to relinquish everything but our personal friendships, of which we cannot be divested, and those acts of beneficence which it is our intention should flow from them.” And the letter concluded by resting the Institution upon “these two great original pillars—Friendship and Charity.”

The altered Institution was never adopted by the State Societies, with whom rested the ultimate decision. As an indication of their attitude, I may cite the circular letter of the New Hampshire Society. This Society saw no force in the arguments of their fellow citizens who demanded so great a sacrifice; it preferred to abolish the Society altogether, rather than to recede partially from the original plan. The letter declared: “We instituted the Society, and considered the emblems of the Order as

the most endearing marks of that friendship which we wished might be held in grateful remembrance by ourselves, and cherished among our children to the latest posterity." And they objected to surrendering their funds for charity to the disposition of the legislature to "be enjoyed, not by us or our descendants, but by others that we know nothing of, and between whom and us there never existed any ties of blood or friendship." "If the Society cannot exist as originally instituted, we shall acquiesce in the abolishing it altogether; but as we became members by signing articles which we then and still suppose originated in virtuous friendship, we cannot conceive ourselves bound by articles we never subscribed." And at a later meeting this Society declared:—"That the abolition of hereditary succession, adopted by said general meeting, is so repugnant to the design of the Institution, and so destructive to the principles on which it was originally founded, that it ought not to be agreed to."

The attitude of the New Hampshire Society was not an isolated one. After the impulsion of the first recommendations of the General Meeting, the New Jersey Society expressed much the same sentiments. Time and again the General Meeting recommended that the State Societies should authorize delegates to make the changes deemed necessary, but such authority was never given. At length, in the General Meeting, the committee on the proposed alterations in the Institution reported:

"From the silence which the State Societies have observed, after the pressing circular letters of the General Meeting, your committee are led to conclude, that they

do not accede to the proposed reform,—and your committee conceive therefrom that they are authorized to report to the General Meeting.

“That the institution of the Society of the Cincinnati, remains as it was originally proposed and adopted by the officers of the American army at their cantonments on the banks of the Hudson River, in 1783.”

This report was unanimously adopted.

Thus was preserved, and bequeathed to their posterity—and to us—“The Hereditary Friendship of the Cincinnati.”

With the passing years the opposition to the Cincinnati grew less active and the members were suffered to spend the Fourth of July after their own fashion. These annual gatherings kept alive the spirit of '76, for here the veterans met and fraternized and fought their battles over again. They talked of Brandywine and Monmouth and Yorktown, and told the story of the many scars they bore. The conviviality was long and joyous on those birthdays of the young nation. Descendants of the first members now constitute the thirteen original Societies and are the heirs of the friendship bequeathed by our fathers.

No discussion of my subject could be adequate which failed to consider the friendship of our gallant and generous allies whose assistance was decisive of the outcome of the American Revolution. None of us but has felt a thrill of sympathy and pride at the heroism of the French nation in this time of her agony and glory; and the remembrance of the old debt to her, grown dim perhaps, but not forgotten, has been revived in the hearts of all Americans. Particularly to the members of the

Cincinnati is this sympathy and friendship a thing of deepest attachment; for the cords of our hearts stretch back over the many years, and we cannot forget the time when the ancestors of these men of France were brothers-in-arms with ours, even as our countrymen are theirs to-day.

It was the enthusiastic sympathy of the French people that was most potent in bringing that country to our aid. There was great advantage for her in neutrality at a time when her ancient enemy was wasting its strength upon an apparently crumbling empire. But French sympathy would not be repressed. Long before the Treaty of Alliance of 1778, men, money and equipment were given generously to America; and this treaty which marked the beginning of open and official aid instituted a policy which effected the triumph of the United States and the temporary ruin of France. Every American should read this treaty, showing, as Hamilton said, "the magnanimous policy of France," and the most generous in history on the part of a great nation dealing with a weak people. The prime minister of Spain called it a "glaring instance of Quixotism." Note that France stipulated for no advantage to herself and no reimbursement. She agreed to make no claim, whatever might be the outcome of the war—even if Canada were reconquered.

Of the factors of French help, the one which holds least place in our gratitude, but which of itself was capable of her ruin, was her expenditure of treasure. The French monarchy was a regime of splendor and magnificence, but beneath the surface were the elements of destruction: a population exploited and oppressed; ruinous taxation;

and intolerable social conditions. We repaid her for loans and supplies about \$11,000,000; but the actual cost in money to her is a matter not easily reckoned. Not only were fleets and armies sent to America but a great war was waged also in Europe, Africa and Asia, and our independence was achieved on the battle fields of the world. A probably fair estimate of her expenditure is about \$600,000,000, equivalent perhaps to two and a half billion at the present day, truly an enormous amount for a distressed country with a population of only 22,000,000.

But what shall we say of her sons who helped?—for we can estimate their service in no tangible terms. We remember Beaumarchais who argued for prompt support to our cause, and who so ably managed the business of supplying our army with munitions of war; the Count De Rochambeau, commander of the French army; the Chevalier de la Luzerne, the Minister to the United States; the Count D'Estaing, the Count de Grasse, the Count de Barras, the Chevalier de Touches, admirals and commanders in the navy of France, to whom in its Institution the Society presented medals containing the orders of the Society; Peter Charles L'Enfant, who came to us early and gave his efficiency and spilled his blood in our service, who was the author of the city plan which is increasingly the admiration of observers of our national capital, and to whose taste we owe the graceful emblem we are so proud to wear,—an emblem which happily symbolizes, in its blending of colors, the union of France and America. And there are a host of other names writ large on the page of our history. But above all we remember one

who is dear to all Americans and dearest to us. We see in Lafayette the embodiment of the spirit and friendship of France. Loving us and the cause which had captured his generous heart, he hurried, with those characteristic and endearing traits of youthful enthusiasm, impetuosity and courage, to offer his life to our service. He wrote on shipboard to his wife, "From love to me, become a good American; the welfare of America is closely bound up with the welfare of mankind." The driest chronicle of action would tell of his transcendent services; but if we needed any proof of his endearing qualities of heart and mind, we would find it with particular satisfaction in the fatherly affection with which Washington regarded him, and the idolizing love and loyalty which the young French aristocrat felt for that noblest of Americans.

It will be remembered that a most important object in the formation of the Society was to confer appropriate honors upon their noble allies, the officers of the French army and navy. No sooner was the Society established than word of it was transmitted to the higher French officers and they were informed that the Society did itself the honor to consider them as members.

The French officers received the honor with the greatest appreciation and pleasure. From Lafayette, to whom Washington had communicated the information, came the warmest and most appreciative of letters. The officers who had returned from their triumph in America were flattered with the smiles of an admiring court, and all wanted to wear the distinguishing badge of their gallantry. Brevet Major L'Enfant wrote to Major-General Baron von Steuben on December 25th, 1783: "Here in

France they are more anxious to obtain the Order of the Cincinnati than to be decorated with the Cross of St. Louis."

Voluntarily, about \$25,000 was subscribed by the officers of the French army and navy for the Society in America, but this, from a sense of delicacy, was declined.

Versailles, the gay capital of France, then exhibited all that vividness and grandeur, that pomp and martial enthusiasm, that deference to form and rank and ceremony which marked its closing days. A fading halo of glory and might and romance was still about the throne of the Bourbons. To the foot of this throne came Lafayette and sought permission to wear, along with his cross of the Order of St. Louis, the eagle of the Cincinnati. The Golden Fleece was the only foreign order permitted to be worn in the royal service; but the French king gave his gracious permission for our members to appear at court with the new decoration.

The claims of the Society upon their affections were not forgotten by the members who survived the terrible era of the French Revolution, and by their descendants. When Lafayette came back to visit us, in 1824 and 1825, his brothers of the Society embraced him with tears in their eyes and gave him the warmest greetings of an adoring nation. The Cincinnati of New York selected his birthday for entertaining him in a manner surpassing all their previous festivals; and throughout the country, his former brothers-in-arms came long and painful journeys at the call of the old friendship. And this fraternal spirit of the Cincinnati lived on, to bring to our centennial celebration of Yorktown descendants of Rochambeau and others, and the Marquis Gaston de Lafayette,

grandson of the General's only son, George Washington de Lafayette.

It gave all our members fresh heart when they read last month that Comte Gilbert de Lafayette, great-great-grandson of our former member, had applied to our War Department for permission to join our army. It was a happy thought for our people to celebrate the 26th of April as "France Day" as a mark of welcome to the distinguished delegation arriving from our sister republic; that day being also the anniversary of the sailing of General Lafayette from Bordeaux to offer us his all in defense of our rights. We have joined in that enthusiasm with which this delegation was received on its arrival in this country. And to-morrow, at the very birthplace of the Society, one of our eminent members, Mr. Justice Francis Key Pendleton, accompanied by members from the various State Societies, will announce to Marshal Joffre his election as an honorary member of the Society and present him with our badge of membership.

We have watched with pride and emotion the exploits of noble Frenchmen in the armies of France, the descendants of our original members, and we have mourned the death of one of them, who was admitted to membership in 1902, and who was killed in action August 20, 1914, Lieutenant Albert Ferdinand Joseph Marie de Saint Sauveur-Bougainville, of the 141st Regiment of Infantry, French Army, a great-great-grandson of Vice Admiral Antoine Count De Bougainville, F. R. S., French Navy.

We have been glad, these last few years, of what our country has given France, and the members of this Society have, in proportion of their means, done more than their share for the relief of the French sufferers.

We can think with pride of our superb hospital units, French Heroes Fund, Le Bien-Être du Blessé, The Fatherless of France, American Ambulance Hospital, The Secours National Fund; our efficient ambulance service; our flying squadron, now officially known as the Lafayette Escadrille, which, on the declaration of war, raised and will hereafter fight under our national colors, in American uniform; and the devotion of Americans on the firing line who heeded the call of the ancient friendship.

In this connection, I may be allowed to quote the words of Alan Seeger, the young American poet who died for France last year, in an "Ode in Memory of the American Volunteers Fallen for France," to have been read—if he had lived—before the statue of Lafayette and Washington in Paris, on Decoration Day, May 30, 1916:

"Ay, it is fitting on this holiday,
Commemorative of our soldier dead,
When—with sweet flowers of our New England May
Hiding the lichened stones by fifty years made gray—
Their graves in every town are garlanded,
That pious tribute should be given too
To our intrepid few
Obscurely fallen here beyond the seas.
Those to preserve their country's greatness died;
But by the death of these
Something that we can look upon with pride
Has been achieved, nor wholly unreplied
Can sneerers triumph in the charge they make
That from a war where Freedom was at stake
America withheld and, daunted, stood aside.

* * * * *

* * * Some there were
Who, not unmindful of the antique debt,
Came back the generous path of Lafayette;
And when of a most formidable foe
She checked each onset, arduous to stem—
Foiled and frustrated them—
On those red fields where blow with furious blow
Was countered, whether the gigantic fray
Rolled by the Meuse or at the Bois Sabot,

Accents of ours were in the fierce mêlée;
And on those furthest rims of hallowed ground
Where the forlorn, the gallant charge expires,
When the slain bugler has long ceased to sound,
And on the tangled wires
The last wild rally staggers, crumbles, stops,
Withered beneath the shrapnel's iron showers:—
Now Heaven be thanked, we gave a few brave drops;
Now Heaven be thanked, a few brave drops were ours.”

And now that we are to stand shoulder to shoulder in the same war with the descendants of our former brothers-in-arms, when we are searching our hearts for our utmost duty, let us be mindful of the principles of our Institution, to give, as a Society, “an incessant attention to preserve inviolate those exalted rights and liberties of human nature for which they * * * fought and bled, and, without which, the high rank of a rational being is a curse instead of a blessing.” Who can say how far-reaching the influence of the Society, with its historic past and its distinguished roll of members, will be in support of our Government in this time of war. In the language of Emerson at Concord: “Though the cannon volleys have a sound of funeral echoes, they can yet hear through them the benedictions of their country and mankind.” Let us now regain our ancient heritage, in the “union sacrée” of France and her friends, thus consecrated in French affection. Then, indeed, we shall have proved true, in full measure, to “The Hereditary Friendship of the Cincinnati.”



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